Bulletin Twenty-two January, 1948

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

The Thoreau Society is an informal organization of several hundred students and followers of the life and works of Henry David Thoreau. Membership is open to anyone interested. Fees are one dollar a year. This bulletin is issued occasionally, usually quarterly, by the secretary. All the material, unless otherwise assigned, is compiled and written by the secretary.

The officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and secretary-treasurer:

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A STUDY OF THOREAU

by

David Kalman

(This psychological study of Thoreau is a digest of a much longer study done for a course in biographical psychology under the direction of Dr. R. M. Elliott at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Elliott, a member of our society, called the study to our attention. And Mr. Kalman, at our request, prepared this digest. It will undoubtedly cause much controversy. We present it therefore not as representing any official opinion of the society or its officers, but rather as a significant attempt to further understand that complex personality Henry David Thoreau.--Ed.)

An understanding of personality involves the discovery of the relevant variables and their interrelationships. These variables are here stated in terms of inherent and acquired needs, utilizing the terminology of Dr. H. A. Murray, formerly Director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic. Freudian vocabulary is also employed (with reservations), while the whole approach to the subject of personality is the result of my studies under Prof. R. M. Elliott of the University of Minnesota. In this summary of a much longer paper, the reader is asked to assume that my conclusions ("hypotheses") are drawn from evidence, the citation of which is not permitted by the limited space.

In any thorough etiology, analysis of the family situation is a predominant factor. While cultural and social phenomena are of the utmost importance, their relative familiarity to most Thoreau students makes it unnecessary to discuss them here.

The personality of Thoreau's father was marked by submissiveness, probably due to repeated business failures. Furthermore his economic position excluded the family from higher social circles. This factor is important in so far as it affects Mrs. Thoreau, the product of a socially significant family. Her domineering behavior was probably a compensation for feelings of social inferiority precipitated by her husband's failure. Evidence also indicated that by means of her dominance she tried to identify herself with her sons in order to fulfill her frustrated ambitions in them. The presence of parental illness (tuberculosis) is another important factor.

Thoreau reacted to a dominating-nurturant discipline with marked repression of aggressive impulses (Need for Agression). Both guilt and feelings of inferiority resulted from such repression. Thoreau also unconsciously felt his parents, particularly his father, inferior and therefore rejected them (N : Rej.).

A Thoreau Panel
by
Gregory Chaloff

(See last page)

Since actual rejection was impossible because of a second complex to be discussed (N : Succorance), he displaced or "shifted" his N : Agg. and his N : Rej. to society. Thus his anti-social attitudes as revealed in his civil disobedience and his tactlessness become more understandable. Other needs developed in the family situation are N : Infavoidance which may be fused with N : Rej. (to scornfully exclude those who have made the subject, Thoreau, feel inferior). N : Seclusion (possibly associated with Thoreau's introversion) was also present. These factors constitute the first complex of interacting needs.

Undoubtedly Thoreau developed a harsh superego (conscience) under the influence of the puritanic ethics of New England. His early repression was associated with this factor.

Furthermore Thoreau's ambitions (ego-ideal - N : Art Creation) severely conflicted with the practical demands of his puritan society. His sense of inferiority probably increased due to his inability to fulfill such demands. To a certain extent he was unable to live up to his own ideals because of the guilt felt in not living up to society's ideals, a guilt resulting from the "censure" of his harsh superego. The resultant ego-ideal-superego conflict, indicated in vacillating behavior in seeking an occupation, was never resolved. Abolitionist sympathies, botanical interests, a possible sense of physical inferiority (asymmetry of build; homeliness), a high abstract and mechanical intelligence were significant products of his heredity and his family environment. High vitality, a temperamental trait, may have been inherited.

A second complex of needs, when taken in conjunction with the first, offers a more comprehensive view of personality. Examination of the evidence reveals the presence of regressive behavior (the resumption under stress of earlier more satisfactory modes of behavior), particularly evident in his misogyny and intense nostalgia and homesickness. Of even greater importance is the fact that Thoreau's love relations were confined to older, maternal-type women. While we may account for this as a result of his rejection by Ellen Sewall (frustration of his only attempt at courtship), the circumstances are more complex. Finally his rapturous lines on nature (which he refers to as mother or mistress) probably indicate a sublimation of his frustrated sex drive. These disparate phenomena gain coherence if interpreted in terms of psychological theory.

One possible explanation of these variables is based upon the aforementioned sense of inferiority. An individual whose love relationships are of the narcistic type is one who feels an underlying insecurity. The desire to receive attention is an attempt to counteract insecurity by having someone shower sympathy on the individual. A maternal love object distinctly fulfills such a function. The influence of the numerous spinsters and widows in the Thoreau home with their puritanical repression of sex is patent both in Thoreau's remarks on love and in his idealization of older women. Thoreau's case might be similar to that of the person who fears that his hostile impulses will alienate others and therefore clings to them for support (N : Succorance - Relationship of Dependency). Thus the necessity for displacing N : Agg. is apparent. Another Thoreau trait, masochism (N : Abasement), is closely related to narcism. Masochism mitigated Henry's feelings of inferiority for "harboring" aggressive impulses. It may explain why Henry stepped aside for his brother John in the Ellen Sewall affair. The second complex consists therefore of N : Sex linked with N : Suc. N : Sentience (to enjoy sensuous impressions) is also significant.

Parental Fixation (adherence to an infantile love object, parents, rather than engagement in a mature love affair) is a second possibility. This theory is less tenable in view of the fact that he may have unconsciously rejected his mother. Fixated individuals (Thoreau?) seek women who are mother substitutes and often engage in relationships with non-marriageable women (Mrs. Emerson?). They usually show an unbounded affection for the mother and suffer severe homesickness. Henry's sublimation of N : Sex in nature love illustrates an excellent relationship of dependency and might also be subsumed under the first hypothesis offered.

I might mention that there is strong evidence for latent homosexuality in Thoreau, a factor closely associated with his narcism. See Dr. Canby's comments on Thoreau's poem "Sympathy" as particularly good evidence illustrating sublimation of this factor.

Emerson's influence upon Thoreau has been analyzed elsewhere. While significant, it must be recognized that the needs motivating Thoreau made him extremely amenable to transcendental suggestion. His psychological picture was leading him to Walden even before he met Emerson. The latter's greatest function was to

hasten the process and set the final "switches." Emerson's exhortations to seek solitude and engage in "living" as a profession offered a solution to the Thoreau ego-ideal - superego conflict. Of great significance was the fact that Emerson introduced Thoreau to oriental literature which has marked affinities with transcendentalism. Particularly important is the belief of the oriental Yogi in the absolute spiritual contact with God. At Walden Thoreau often assumed the status of a Yogi. Autism and mutism, regressive features of the Oriental philosophy, were outstanding factors in Thoreau's personality. These variables are instances of N : Suc.

Let us examine briefly the potentialities offered by a prolonged stay at Walden Pond:

1. Walden would satisfy his N : Sex by sublimating it in nature love.
2. It would satisfy his N : Suc. by allowing him to merge himself completely with Nature, establishing a relationship of dependency thereby and giving him the security he desired.
3. His N : Rej. would be negated, for he would have rejected society completely.
4. Finally, both his N : Sentience and his N : Seclusion would find satisfaction. Nevertheless his writings and the appearance of an obsessive-compulsive neurosis indicate that this was not the case. Several theories suggest themselves

Briefly the most important possibility exists in Prof. Gordon Allport's principle of Functional Autonomy which states that any means by which a drive is satisfied may become a drive itself. Thus the Thoreau neurosis (a means) may have set itself up in its own right as an independent motivating system. As a matter of fact it is questionable whether Thoreau engaged in his pantheistic search at Walden Pond to satisfy his N : Suc. and N : Rej. in the first place. I believe that he was not merely egocentric in his search and that there was a definite extension of self. It may be that his strong transcendental interest, which was the dominant one in his life, had become an end in itself. He might have gone to Walden to lose himself in a religious interest per se. The pond therefore would not have solved his basic problems. This hypothesis does not negate the existence of the basic need complexes.

In conclusion there is evidence for the existence of a psychoneurotic reaction characterized by compulsions and obsessional thoughts (Psychasthenia). Psychasthenic persons usually show extreme orderliness, stubbornness (N : Rej.), idealistic trends, a high degree of persistence, and tenderness, all Thoreau characteristics. The obsessive tendencies may have arisen as a substitute for the repressed aggression. These neurotic features may be a defense against the aggression. The major fear of such persons is that of being humiliated (N : Infavoidance). Thus Thoreau's many references to the "Apollo and Admetus" theme become plausible. Perfectionism, a Thoreau trait, is also a factor in this neurosis and usually indicative of feelings of inferiority.

Rationalization was used extensively by Thoreau. He rationalized his social failure by ridiculing manners; his desire for recognition and income by defaming their inherent materialism. Extensive rationalization indicates little self-objectification, a prerequisite for complete maturity.

While much has been omitted, particularly the relevant evidence, it is hoped that these concepts have lent some consistency to the variagated behavior of Thoreau. It is to be recognized that no personality can be reduced to a few rules. Analyzing behavior with our present set of psychological tools involves insurmountable difficulties. The product of such an analysis often bears little resemblance to the total personality analyzed. But with time psychological research may yet produce more adequate concepts for portraying the dynamics of personality.

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<u>IMPORTANT</u> <u>ANNOUNCEMENT:</u> Because so many of our members have expressed a desire to obtain complete files of our bulletin, we have now reprinted the first nine bulletins, many of which had long been out-of-print. These are reprinted together in one booklet which sells for fifty cents All the other bulletins (#10 to #21) are still available for twenty-five cents each. All may be obtained from the secretary.

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Mr. Francis H. Allen has written us pointing out that John Burroughs must have been familiar with Thoreau's writings before the date, 1897, set by Julian Burroughs in his article in the last bulletin. Mr. Allen states that Burroughs knew of Thoreau as early as 1866, had written an article on him in <u>Scribner's</u> in 1881, had quoted <u>Walden</u> in 1877, and recommended it highly to a young reader in 1888.

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Ballou, Adin. "For a Winter Night." CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR. Oct.15, 1947. Another sonnet on T.

_____. "The New England Wood Lot." N.Y.HERALD-TRIBUNE. Dec.21, 1947. An editorial.

Canby,H.S. Letter to editor. NEWSLETTER OF COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION, IV (Nov.,1942),2. On students' attitudes towards Thoreau.

_____. "A Self-appointed Interpreter to America." CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR. Dec. 13, 1945.

_____. "Thoreau and the Abolitionists." in Rosenthal, Hummel & Leichty, EFFECTIVE READING. Boston: Houghton,Mifflin, 1944. An extract from the 1939 biography. Pp. 65-72.

Crosbie, Mary. "The Poet by His Pond." JOHN O'LONDON'S WEEKLY, LVI (Oct.3,1947). A British evaluation of Thoreau, p. 621.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Thoreau." PACIFIC SPECTATOR, I (Autumn, 1947), 464-477. A reprint of the funeral oration.

HOBBIES. "Walden Pond Preserve." LII (Oct. 1947), 143. A brief note on the state reservation.

Ives, Charles. CONCORD SONATA. New York: Arrow Music Press, 1947. We have already commented in previous bulletins on this musical tribute to Thoreau and have pointed out that one of our leading critics has called it the greatest piece of music yet composed in America. We are happy now then to announce that it is at last available to the general public.

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Morgan, Arthur E. THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDWARD BELLAMY. New York: Kings Crown Press. The second chapter deals, in part, with Thoreau's debt to India.

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Proctor, Edwin W. "From Thoreau's Seat." HARTFORD COURAN . Sept. 23, 1945. A poem.

Robbins, Roland W. DISCOVERY AT WALDEN. Adams, Raymond. Review. AMERICAN LITERATURE, XIX (Nov 1947),276.

Scudder, Townsend. "Thoreau's Hut Fitted Like a Coat" CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR. May 20, 1947. An excerpt from CONCORD: AMERICAN TOWN.

Smith, Erwin F. "Thoreau's Note Books." SCHOOL MODERATOR. Sept. 4, 1884. A review of Spring and Summer.in a Grand Rapids, Mich. paper.

Snow, Edward Rowe. "Salvage Silver Coins from Old Pirate Hulk Whidah in Waters Off Cape Cod." BOSTON POST. Oct. 5, 1947 P.A-12. With quotations from Thoreau on the same wreck.

Thompson, Ruth. "Minnesota Memories: Jonathan T. Grimes, Early Settler." MINNEAPOLIS MORNING TRIBUNE. Nov. 3, 1947. On Thoreau's Minn. visit.

Timms, Cartwright. "The Philosophy of Henry David Thoreau." LONDON QUARTERLY AND HOLBURN REVIEW, CLXXII (April, 1947), 152-6. An essay in the official publication of British Methodism.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience." in Wheat. THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION IN AMERICA. Boston: Ginn, 1943. pp.193-5. A condensed version for the use of West Point students!

_____. The Same. in Blair, Hornberger, & Stewart. THE LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES. Chicago: Scott,Foresman,1946. Plus "Walking," excerpts from WALDEN and the Journals and various poems. I, 938-979. An excellent anthology from which the illustration on our front page is taken.

_____. "Higher Laws." in Blair & Gerber. BETTER READING. Chicago: Scott,Foresman, 1945. Chapter from WALDEN, pp.282-293.

_____. Quotations. in Barrows. ONE THOUSAND BEAUTIFUL THINGS. Chicago: People's Book Club, 1947. Many brief quotations, passim.

_____. WALDEN AND SELECTED ESSAYS. Edited and with Introduction by George F. Whicher. Chicago: Packard, 1947. $1.25. This inexpensive reprint contains the entire WALDEN, plus six essays, a long introduction by Dr. Whicher, and an especially good bibliography. If you are looking for a good edition of WALDEN to use in your classes, teachers, here is certainly the best for the money. Dr. Whicher, as usual, succeeds in saying just the right things about Thoreau.

_____. "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For." EFFECTIVE READING (See Canby, above). The chapter from WALDEN, pp. 421-429.

_____. The Same. in Tenney INTELLIGENT READING. New York: Crofts, 1938. Pp. 349-358.

_____. THE WORKS OF THOREAU. Selected and Edited by H.S.Canby. London: Allen & Unwin, 1947. An English reprint.

White, E.B. "Walden" in EFFECTIVE READING (See Canby, above). Essay reprinted from ONE MAN'S MEAT, pp. 429-433.

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United Wallpaper, Inc. (Chicago, Ill.) has issued a wallpaper (Sidewall #5867) named after Thoreau. It shows deer standing by a lake.

Edwin Way Teale and A.G.Volkman have called our attention to a moth named after Thoreau. It is one of the heliothids, Schinia Thoreaui, named in October, 1880, by A.R.Grote of the Buffalo Museum and Coleman T. Robinson of Philadelphia.

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Thoreau monuments seem bound to have misspellings. The bronze plaque which has marked the cairn for some years had "Merrimac" for "Merrimack" in the title of Thoreau's first book. And now it has been discovered that the new granite marker at the site of the cabin reads "upwards" instead of "upward" in the line, "Go thou my incense upward from this hearth."

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Mrs. Harold H. Clum sends us the following clipping from GOOD HOUSEKEEPING for Sept. 1906 (p. 317):

> The Thoreau hatpin is a novelty seen in Concord, Massachusetts, and so named in commemoration of the philosopher. It seems that during his residence in Concord, Thoreau sowed in the Sudbury river some Japanese nuts of a fantastic shape. From these has grown a small tree which bears the nuts abundantly. They are hard and have a dull, grayish-brown luster. Mounted simply in silver, the hatpins are durable, as well as beautiful and unique. The idea may suggest similar devices where the Japanese nuts are not available. L. W. J.

She wonders if this can be Trapa natans, described in Gray's Botany as the Water Nut or Water Caltrop, of Eurasian origin, and occurring in quiet streams and ponds of Middlesex County, Mass. We also would like to know how authentic is this story that Thoreau introduced the plant. If so, where did he get it? Can anyone help us?

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NEWS FROM THE LOCAL GROUPS. The Concord group is holding its regular winter series of meetings under the direction of G.W.Lee. . . . Leonard Kleinfeld is giving a series of Tuesday night lectures on WALDEN for the New York group.

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THOREAU IN FICTION: Dr. Benjamin Woodbury calls our attention to the fact that the protagonist of John Buchan's novel MOUNTAIN MEADOW quotes from WALDEN on facing facts.

Jo Ann Wheeler points out that one of the suspects in Francis Bonnamy's who-dun-it A ROPE OF SAND (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1944) is an ardent admirer of Thoreau. Fortunately she is not the guilty soul.

Macmillan has scheduled for May publication a [illegible] entitled WALDEN TWO by B. F. Skinner. It is to be about a modern Utopia in the United States.

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As you have already noticed, we are featuring a new typography this issue. If you like the larger type, let us know. It does cut down the amount of material which can be included in each issue. But perhaps it is worth it to your eyes.